

I'm not a web developer, just a humble writer, editor and proofreader



By [Thalia Anderson](#)

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Birth of the idiot

Spurred on by assurances that it's easy to create a website, I decided to set up my own. I could see it. Elegant and dignified, no fancy bells and whistles, informative but not stuffy. It would champion the benefits of communication that is grammatically correct, is written in plain English, and is free of spelling errors.

I chose a ready-made [WordPress](#) theme, and set off on my walk in the park. Hmm? The walk turned into a schlep through a dense forest that covered an unfamiliar and foreign terrain. It was long, disorientating, and trial and error dominated the day (weeks, to be exact).

(I hasten here to emphasise that I am not badmouthing the WordPress guys. They offer an amazing product, have stacks of marvellous plugins, and are available for advice and support when needed. What is appropriate in my case is the adage, "Intel inside, idiot outside".)



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Unleashing the idiot

I set about creating menus and pages for the content I had been painstakingly working on for months. My troubles began when I realised I couldn't change fonts and insert widgets in areas of my choice. The theme I had chosen restricted me. I could have upgraded to the premium package (at a price), but freelancers have to spend cautiously on luxuries, and I wasn't too sure if I really wanted the theme I had chosen.

To tweak the look and feel of pages means putting on a web developer's hat and entering the dreaded CSS (cascading style sheet). Very dangerous territory for me, a complete novice cursed with an irritatingly positive attitude that I can do anything if I persevere long enough.

Nonetheless, I dived in. Adrift in this hieroglyphic landscape, I found it difficult to restore the original settings once I had interfered with them. I even resorted to a different theme at one stage, but was horrified at the distorted site that created. I ceased fiddling, and decided to leave well enough alone until I had a bit more knowledge.

Finally, my site was up-and-running. It wasn't perfect, but at least I had a place to which I could direct potential clients. I sat back and beamed broadly.

Gleeful idiot

It was with great excitement when, a few days after 'going live', I discovered I had had some visitors. And they had posted comments. Most of them were vague and some were incomprehensible, but to me they were a gratifying response. I patted myself on the back.

My delight was short lived. "They're generated by spambots, Mom. Somewhere on your site there's an opening that's allowing them access."

Spambots? Off to [Wikipedia](#) - 'A spambot is an automated computer program designed to assist in the sending of spam'. I was the victim of comment spam.

Back to [my site](#) and the ruthless removal of all the comment blocks, including the registration and log in pages. A trickle of comments still came through. Somewhere I had overlooked a gap.

Into the site's editorial section where I unticked every block remotely connected to comments and replies. I also discovered a section where I could block messages from unwanted visitors by typing in a word from their addresses.

My black list contains words like 'gold, Gucci, sex, Viagra, running shoes, Nike, sunglasses and Ralph Lauren shirts'. That seems to have worked, but I'm wondering if my brutal purge hasn't also blocked the search engines...

I apologise to all (ahem) my visitors who would like to post a comment. Please use my email address on the contact page. I will get around to sorting out things eventually, once I have unscrambled the (sometimes) indecipherable phrases in the how-to guides.

Unstoppable idiot

Always up to a challenge, I forged ahead on my perilous journey. I convinced myself that every self-respecting site deserves a counter to monitor its traffic, and icons linking to social media sites. I browsed among a multitude of plugins, downloaded a couple, uploaded them to my site and installed them. I glowed with deep satisfaction.

I was happily playing around with my new gizmos when my site disappeared. I was left with a blank, white screen. A feeling of panic welled up inside me. How could this be happening? After all my weeks of hard work I was close to tears.

Emergency call to [Afrihost](#). A friendly voice soothed my nerves, listened politely to my tale, and restored my site to its former state. My immediate reaction was to delete the counter and social media icon plugins. I doubt very much they were the problem. More likely than not, it was the idiot outside who had done something, somewhere.

My confidence that Afrihost was backing up my site emboldened me. It wasn't long before I was sniffing around [Google Analytics](#). I installed it successfully and it appears to be working, but I'm sure it counts me as traffic, despite my attempts to adjust the settings and apply filters. Every time I log in, I'm inflating my own figures. Eish bru (to use a delightful South African expression)!

The idiot's meaning of easy

The next time somebody tells me setting up a website is easy, I'm going to ask "easy relative to what?" I bet it's the young, tech-savvy folk who say it's easy. They have no clue how excruciatingly painful a challenge like that can be for the *more mature* person.

A note to the *less mature*; putting together a website **is** rocket science if you want to customise a theme or add more-advanced plugins. You need some knowledge of code. My desire for a simple little site to showcase my work has been a tortuous expedition. I sort of have a place now, but, judging by the fast-moving and ever-changing technological landscape (and all the information I still need to absorb), my journey is far from over.

An upside of the experience is the addition of some savvy words to my vocabulary. I can discuss apps, plugins, widgets, CSS, URL, search engines, bots, crawlers, white and black hat SEO techniques, pingbacks and trackbacks with ease. Most importantly I know what I can meddle with on my site, and what I should not meddle with.

I'm not a web developer, just a humble writer, editor and proofreader who's been reduced to a blithering idiot. I hate to admit it, but it's time to bring in the experts. In the meantime I'm trying hard to shrug off the mantle of the idiot outside the box.

ABOUT THALIA ANDERSON

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